



ACTION MAN: Tony Thorpe in the thick of it against Oldham Athletic last night. **Picture:** JANE SHERLOCK

It's hard now, Joe

**LUTON TOWN 0
OLDHAM ATHLETIC 0**
**DAVE FLETT reports from
Kenilworth Road**

IF LUTON Town are to clinch a play-off spot this season they will have to do it the hard way.

The Hatters displayed plenty of spirit and commitment against a tough Oldham side last night, but could not find the goal that would have secured a priceless three points.

And a victory for QPR against Cheltenham meant the gap between Joe Kinnear's men and sixth spot has now widened to six points with eight games left to play.

Fit-again Sol Davis returned to the Hatters' line-up after recovering from a hamstring injury, with David Bayliss dropping to the bench and Ian Hillier switching to right-back despite a bandaged head.

Midfielder Paul Hughes was recalled in place of the injured Steve Robinson, while Adrian Forbes was named in a Hatters' squad for the first-time since suffering cruciate knee ligament damage in pre-season.

An entertaining an evenly-matched first-half saw both sides create good opportunities to open the scoring.

match facts

LUTON TOWN: Lars Hirschfeld (sub 24 mins, Carl Emberson), Ian Hillier, Russell Perrett, Chris Coyne, Sol Davis, Paul Hughes (sub 74 mins, Peter Holmes), Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring, Ahmet Brkovic, Steve Howard, Tony Thorpe. **Other subs:** Adrian Forbes, David Bayliss, Duncan Jupp.

OLDHAM ATHLETIC: Leslie Pogliacomi, David Beharall, Will Haining, Chris Armstrong, Paul Murray, Lee Duxbury, John Eyre, Tony Carss, Darren Sheridan, Clyde Wijnhard, Wayne Andrews. **Subs:** David Miskelly, Carlo Corazzin, Ben Burgess, Josh Low, Dean Holden.

REFEREE: Rob Styles (Hants)

ATTENDANCE: 6,142.

TOP HATTER: Ian Hillier - another fine home performance from the defender.

Matthew Spring possibly missed the best when he dragged his shot wide from eight yards on three minutes after good work by Tony Thorpe.

Thorpe then crossed for Steve Howard after a mistake by Oldham captain Lee Duxbury, but the Hatters' top scorer's close-range volley was beaten out by visitors' keeper Leslie Pogliacomi.

Davis was a relieved man on 15 minutes when he was rescued by keeper Lars Hirschfeld, who saved at Clyde Wijnhard's feet after the left-back under-hit a back-pass.

The on-loan Spurs keeper saved John Eyre's shot on the turn from eight yards two minutes later before lively Oldham striker Wayne Andrews skipped past Chris Coyne, but shot into the side-netting.

Hirschfeld limped out of the action with a leg injury on 24 minutes and was replaced by Carl Emberson.

The Hatters' substitute keeper did not have to make a save for the rest of the half.

Thorpe should have tested Oldham keeper Pogliacomi on 29 minutes, but guided his stooping header from Kevin Nicholls' free-kick wide.

Paul Murray then cleared another Thorpe header off the line.

Eyre's sliced volley from the edge of the box comfortably cleared Emberson's crossbar three minutes after the break.

But Oldham went closer to breaking the deadlock on 63 minutes when Andrews got in behind Perrett and sent in a low cross that eluded Emberson, only for Davis to execute a perfect tackle and prevent Duxbury

from finding an empty net.

Thorpe had a hopeful penalty appeal turned down on 69 minutes when he tumbled in the box after the slightest contact from David Beharall.

A clever corner saw Eyre go close for the visitors with a low 30-yard drive that whistled wide on 72 minutes.

Danger man Andrews then tested Emberson with a low drive from the edge of the box.

Peter Holmes replaced Paul Hughes on 74 minutes with Ahmet Brkovic switching from the left side of midfield to the right.

Thorpe forced a save from Pogliacomi when he stretched to meet Nicholls' through ball.

Howard was then only inches away from making contact with a dangerous Hillier cross on 80 minutes.

● The Hatters' trip to Cheltenham, scheduled for March 29, has been re-arranged for Tuesday, April 8 because of international call-ups. Cheltenham have had Michael Duff and Grant McCann selected for the full Northern Ireland squad and Shane Duff has been named in the under 21s' party.